

Research Title: Examining the Intersections between Reproduction, Religion and Culture

Research topic: To document the moral and religious arguments of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice over their fifty year history and to examine and situate these arguments within the socio-cultural and political history of the United States during this same period.

This research will focus on the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), a non-profit organization that advances reproductive health, choice, rights, and justice through education and advocacy. Since RCRC's establishment in 1967 (originally founded as RCAR - Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights), the legal, moral, theological, and philosophical approaches to supporting women and families that have marked their work have developed within a changing religious, cultural, and political context. My research aims to document the changing rhetoric in RCRC's work over time and to examine how these shifts are related to the changing cultural and political context. In this way, this project is interested in examining the fluid relationship between religion and culture. To assess these shifts in RCRC's approach to abortion, I will examine how their narratives, messaging, and discussions of abortion shift over the fifty years of their existence. These fifty years encompass arguments from the pre-Roe era that focus on the decriminalization of abortion and move through different phases of approaching questions of abortion including reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice. Central questions guiding my inquiry include: How do different religious denominations and branches vary their involvement with RCRC alongside the changing ideologies of their congregants? How do major and minor public policy shifts and legal decisions influence the ideology and theology of RCRC? What influences do cultural and societal movements have on the membership, moral interpretations, and philosophical stances of RCRC? What other major factors have shaped the organization's shift from rights to choice to justice?

Rationale for research:

Abortion, reproduction, and women's reproductive health are paramount concerns of public health. More than that, however, they serve as platforms for grandstanding for cultural and religious conservatives who seek to promote traditional and conservative perspectives about women's role in society. These debates also function to call into question women's autonomy and agency as moral individuals. Women's

control over their bodily self has long been at odds with traditional patriarchal standards for society and masculinist Christianity. Patriarchal Christian attitudes have, in turn, influenced cultural attitudes about women in ways that have denied women the right to act as moral agents when it comes to their bodily autonomy, as well as refusing to recognize woman as fully rational individuals.

Tensions between Christianity and women's rights have been growing since the women's liberation movement in the 1970s. As public discourse shifts from abortion rights, to reproductive rights, to reproductive justice, it is important to examine and understand how the religious attitudes and perspectives bear on these cultural debates. An organization like RCRC offers the opportunity to track these intersections over time. This research carries a personal significance for me, because growing up in a Christian home has shaped much of my thoughts and approaches to issues. Many Christians see issues of equality and women's rights as in conflict with modern day Christianity, but I have learned that my passion for intersectional feminism is not only motivated by my faith, but justified by it. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice has been doing work that's surprised the general public and been rejected by more conservative branches for decades now, and understanding how they have developed their legal, theological, and philosophical positions will give a sense of how the movement itself has shifted, and where it can go from here.

How project aligns with CSRCS mission:

This research project aligns with the CSRCS mission because my research will focus on the intersection of religion and society, specifically the relationship between social and cultural attitudes about abortion, contraception, and women's reproductive capacities. The religious attitudes and arguments related to these same areas will be examined in my pursuit to better understand how society and religion intersect and are part of a porous relationship between religion and culture. As an interdisciplinary project, I will draw on the skills I have gained in critical analysis from my philosophy courses to help me analyze the relationship between the cultural context and the religious arguments, which promotes the growth of my critical thinking skills in both areas. This project will also help promote community understanding about the intersection of Christianity and women's reproductive rights, and allow further action to be taken in

advocating for and supporting women's rights. Because RCRC is an multifaith organization made up of Christian, Jewish, and leaders of other religious traditions, my research will also require some interfaith exploration regarding different belief systems.

Final assignment:

The final assignment for this grant will be in the form of an annotated bibliography comprised of ten to fifteen high quality sources. This annotated bibliography will be the beginning of my College Fellows research project, which will span the next two years. It will also assist me in applying for other fellowships and opportunities, such as the Leadership Prize, which will support my research further.

Bibliography

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